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RUEHBD/AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 0001
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0102
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0001
RUEHCN/DTS CHENGDU
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0001
RUEHCHI/DTS CHIANG MAI
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0016
RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI 0001
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0001
RUEHHM/DTS HO CHI MINH CITY
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0186
RUEHKUK/REO KIRKUK 0001
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0008
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 0001
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0005
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 0005
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0204
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0044
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RUEHVN/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 0001
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - Paragraphs 8 and 9 garbled in transm

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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA -- SOME LISTEN TO ALLAH, SOME TO THE POLLS;
POLITICS IN EAST JAVA'S LARGEST MUSLIM ORGANIZATION

REF: JAKARTA 488

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11. (SBU) Summary: What role will the world's largest Muslim organization play in the run up to Indonesia's 2009 Presidential election? The East Java governor's race could provide a preview of the declining role of large Muslim organizations like Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), with some 40 million members nationally. Several current and former high-level NU cadres have declared their candidacy for vice governor with their campaigns claiming at least notional NU support. Observers tell us that the refusal of the Chair of East Java NU to either stop his campaign or resign from NU suggests that he sees little risk in alienating his membership. Moreover, the party created to bind the apolitical NU membership into a cohesive political force, the National Awakening Party (PKB) is in total disarray (many would argue that the last leadership battle in PKB was equally contentious.) Whether the declining impact of organizations like NU on political races will create opportunities for a growing Muslim political party like the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) remains to be seen. End Summary

Does NU Matter?

12. (U) NU was founded in 1926 in Surabaya by Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari -- grandfather of Abdurahman Wahid or Gus Dur, who would later become the national chairman of NU and President of Indonesia. Since its establishment in 1952, NU struggled to preserve its original character as a religious and social organization. However, its leaders have been invariably tempted to enter political life. Under Sukarno, NU became one of the biggest political parties in Indonesia by 1955. NU's political activities declined subsequently under Suharto, and in 1973 NU politicians were forced to join a single amalgam of Islamic parties, the United Development Party (PPP). Representing the NU heartland, East Java NU announced a commitment to return to its original status as a religious and social organization (and to stay out of politics) at its 1984 Congress. Having come full circle, NU officially maintains a distance from electoral politics, but allows its membership to join parties as individuals.

13. (SBU) Today, NU is distinguished by the religious and socio-economic profile of its membership. Its membership is largely drawn from rural areas and "kampung" or working-class, urban neighborhoods. With no membership cards, no dues and self-financed meetings, for those who consider themselves members, NU is tantamount to the practice of Islam itself. NU accepts pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, mixed with Islamic rituals. Members are guided in their religious practice by the Kiai, local religious leaders and respected figures, who are consulted concerning a wide range of religious and social matters.

14. (SBU) When Suharto stepped down, Gus Dur, as the chairman of

National NU, established the National Awakening Party (PKB). PKB's appeal was based on being the true political heir to NU, according to Prof. Aribowo, the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Airlangga University in Surabaya. From its inception, Gus Dur intended the PKB to give voice to the political aspirations of NU members. In 1998, the year Gus Dur became President, PKB gave voice to NU adherents and garnered their full support. Since then, NU politicians and voters have routinely scattered their support among various political

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parties. Recent squabbling over the leadership of PKB itself demonstrates the difficulty of party building among this constituency (reftel). The multiple party allegiances of East Java gubernatorial candidates, who also claim to be NU favorites, further highlights this disunity.

A Study in Miscalculation, Ali Maschan Moesa

15. (SBU) If there was a blurred line between political participation and NU bylaws, it just got a lot clearer for Ali Maschan Moesa, the current chairman of East Java NU. Ali Maschan has taken a hit in the press for "listening to the polls, instead of Allah" and trying to parlay his East Java NU leadership into a successful candidacy for East Java Vice Governor. According to the East Java NU hierarchy, Ali Maschan must choose between NU leadership and the election. But he wants it both ways. His acceptance of a spot on the ticket with current Vice Governor and East Java Golkar Chairman Soenarjo and refusal to relinquish his chairmanship provoked the ire of East Java NU's rule-making clerics, the Syuriah Council. Since Ali Maschan had signed a contract foreswearing political candidacy, East Java's NU Council found Ali Maschan Moesa in breach of contract.

16. (SBU) Ali Maschan maintains he is still nominally chairman and will return after a leave of absence, or quit altogether if he wins. In the meantime, the Council has replaced Ali Maschan with NU cleric Muttawakil Allah, leader of an Islamic boarding school in Probboling, East Java. Prof. Aribowo, a personal acquaintance of Ali Maschan Moesa, told the Consulate that the dispute has deeply wounded Ali Maschan politically. By showing a lack of respect for the Council's decision, Ali Maschan failed to finesse East Java NU and turned them against him. In short, while NU support cannot be counted on to help a candidate, NU antipathy can be counted on to hurt his chances.

National NU Carpetbaggers in East Java

17. (SBU) While Ali Maschan has been forced to resign, candidates from National NU's top echelon, some also former cabinet ministers, have no such restrictions. To date, two pairs of candidates have tried to lay claim to NU votes based on their current national NU leadership positions. East Java Provincial Secretary Soekarwo is teamed with Syaifullah Yusuf (aka Gus

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Ipul). Syaifullah is head of National NU's Youth Organization, is former State Minister for Development in Undeveloped Regions, (he is also Gus Dur's nephew and was forced to flee PKB after a falling out with Gus Dur). Their ticket is supported by the Democratic Party (PD) and National Mandate Party (PAN). Khofifah, head of the Women's Division of National NU and former Minister of Women's Empowerment, is teamed with Mujiono, former Chief of Staff of East Java's Military Command. They are supported by a coalition of 12 smaller parties. Khofifah took a leave of absence from NU when announcing her candidacy. Another East Java gubernatorial candidate promises to fragment notional NU votes further still. Running with the endorsement of Gus Dur and the PKB party, at least for now, Mojokerto Regent Achmady has told local media that NU votes will go to his camp because the "pro Gus Dur NU community will definitely back his candidacy." Achmady is off to a dismal start as PKB infighting has only added to his problems locating a suitable and willing

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running mate, according to local media. If he fails to name a vice governor candidate by April 27, he will be lose his PKB endorsement.

Politics Tempt the Weak and Weaken NU

18. (SBU) Haryadi, a professor and political observer at Surabaya's Airlangga University, told the Consulate that even if NU's membership were cohesive, the number of top echelon NU cadres running for office have hopelessly split potential NU support. This has further fragmented NU and complicated efforts by political parties and their candidates to reach out to these Muslim 'values voters' during the election. Haryadi suggested that if NU were to seek political unity it could become a formidable party machine, but concludes that it has not and is unlikely to do so. Haryadi speculated that many NU elite are running in the governor's election because they can't resist trying to convert their credentials into the power and wealth promised by elective office.

19. (SBU) Taufikurahman Saleh, an NU cadre and national parliamentarian, told the Consulate that other candidates would benefit from NU's internal divisions and in the end NU would get nothing from the race. Echoing this, Krisnugroho, a lecturer in

political science at Airlangga University, told local media that confusion among NU voters would again lead them to elect the current leading "non-NU" candidates Sucipto (Deputy Chair of the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and Ridwan Hisyam (Deputy Speaker of the East Java Parliament and former Chair of East Java Golkar). This result would mirror the 2004 presidential election when NU votes were split between competing NU-linked candidates. Voters rejected vice presidential candidates Kiai Hasyim Muzadi, National Chairman of NU and Megawati's running mate and Kiai Sholahudin Wahid, Gus Dur's younger brother, and General Wiranto's running mate. President Yudhoyono and Yusuf Kalla, with no NU pedigree, garnered 60% of the total vote in East Java.

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